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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: FLN WINS SENATE IN CLOSER-THAN-EXPECTED ELECTION

REF: A. 06 ALGIERS 2067

[1](#)B. 06 ALGIERS 2082

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (U) As expected (ref A), the National Liberation Front (FLN) wrested control of the Senate from the RND party in December 28 indirect elections. What was not expected was its slender margin of victory: the FLN took only 28 seats out of a possible 48. Since the majority of eligible electors in 45 of the 48 wilayas (provinces) were FLN members, the press and most political observers had expected the FLN to win something closer to 45 seats. After first describing the election results as an FLN "tsunami," Prime Minister (and FLN head) Abdelaziz Belkhadem back-pedalled in early January, admitting that his party "lost many, many votes and could have done better."

[1](#)2. (C) Existing internal dissent from members favoring former FLN head Benflis (ref B) was exasperated by the primary process leading to the Senate vote, which left a number of candidates with good reputations and vote tallies without official party support. Many of the unsuccessful FLN primary candidates opted to run as independents, and three of them won -- in Illizi, Ghardaia, and Boumerdes. Other party members who were not selected as official candidates opted to vote against the chosen FLN candidate, leading to a surprisingly good showing for other parties. PM Belkhadem responded to the defections by accusing FLN members who voted for other parties of selling out, and by threatening disciplinary action against them.

When Is a Loss a Win?

[1](#)3. (C) The RND, which had a majority of electors in only five wilayas, ultimately won 12 seats in as many wilayas. This more-than-doubling of its expected victories prompted much of the local media to declare RND the "victor" even though it lost control of the Senate. The moderate Islamist MSP party won three seats, and the predominantly Berber RCD party one seat. RCD spokesman Tarik Mira expressed great satisfaction with his party's win, claiming that it came as a surprise as the RCD had been focusing on preparations for elections for the lower house of parliament, expected in May. The other predominantly Berber party, FFS, excluded itself voluntarily from the Senate elections.

[1](#)4. (C) Former RND MP Fatma Zohra Mansouri told us that the FLN's "lack of discipline (was) highly profitable" for her party. Nadia Mellal, a reporter for the French-language daily Liberte who closely followed the senatorial campaign,

said that Belkhadem was clearly irritated and embarrassed by his party's showing. His main concern now, she claimed, was ensuring that this "tragedy" for the FLN did not repeat itself in the May elections. The FLN, she said, had taken the image of a united party speaking with a single voice and turned it on its head. In Mellal's view, the FLN's "campaign supervisors" -- government ministers and members of the party's steering committee -- performed miserably on the campaign trail because they were dull and unconvincing. She said it was obvious that the FLN electors -- and, she claimed, ordinary Algerians who would vote in the May parliamentary elections -- were turned off by their discourse. Given the way the Senate campaign was managed, Mellal concluded that Belkhadem needed to rethink his approach for the upcoming elections.

Comment: Belkhadem Blues

15. (C) It is evident that Prime Minister Belkhadem now has serious problems within the FLN and that they are largely of his own making. In November, when the primary election process was just beginning, senior FLN representatives touted it as clear and transparent. But the process evidently did not lead to a party list that corresponded to the desires of the FLN primary voters -- and it was Belkhadem and his steering committee who ignored those voters in compiling the list. The prime minister has reacted to the election by publicly calling on President Bouteflika to reshuffle his cabinet. Political observers and MPs speculate that a reshuffle could come as early as this week, though differ widely on their predictions of the extent of any change. Whether the cabinet is reshuffled or not, Belkhadem has emerged politically bruised from the Senate elections.

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